

# THE FIVE CRITERIA: EVALUATION STANDARDS FOR PAPERS

## Content

Your paper should respond to and fulfill the specific terms of the assignment; it should demonstrate that you have read and followed the assignment instructions. Revisions of your paper should demonstrate that you have considered your peers' and my feedback as well as the descriptions of the criteria below. Content also includes issues related to your ability to show deep, critical thought. This is truly the most important of the five criteria. It is important because it truly doesn't matter how well you can put together a sentence or a paragraph if you have nothing meaningful to say. Your content grade is based on having something to say, something worth reading, something that answers "so what?" and "who cares?" and shows your voice and personality.

## Purpose

Your paper should be organized around a clear purpose or thesis—a reason for you to be writing and for your reader to be reading. In most cases, your thesis statement should clearly and concisely articulate an arguable claim—a statement that your reader could disagree with and argue against. Your claim should express an idea that is not trivial, superficial, or obvious. What this means is that you find insight into the topic, something that others may not have considered or noticed. This requires deep, critical thought from you. Hopefully, you chose your topic carefully. Remember, while a thesis statement is simply one sentence near the beginning of the paper, the thesis itself—the purpose for you to write and your reader to read—is the point of the *whole* paper, the one thing you are ultimately trying to say. Like critical thought, a paper without a purpose has little value. Your ultimate purpose is to help your reader see what you see: a convincing paper, even if it isn't meant to be an argument, and one with a solid purpose.

## Organization

A well-organized essay develops logically. Each point builds on the one before it. A claim—thesis and topic sentences—will be followed by evidence and analysis of that evidence; then a related claim will be introduced along with appropriate evidence and analysis, and so on. The paper will include "road signs"—title, introduction, transitions—to let the reader know where the essay is going and how its parts are connected, both within and among paragraphs. Appropriate emphasis will be placed on each part of the argument, so that central and most important ideas receive more attention than minor ones. Ask yourself whether each part of your paper is an important element of your argument. Every paragraph should have a purpose, and every sentence should help construct the meaning of a paragraph. A unified paper excludes anything irrelevant to the thesis.

## Support

A well-developed paper will be explained enough to satisfy a skeptical reader, someone who has not considered what you are writing about and has no reason to believe anything you say. By the time he is finished reading your essay, he should be convinced he is wrong, convinced he is right, or at least be thinking more open-mindedly. Consider each of the following questions: Do you provide ample support for your thesis? Do you make any statements or claims that you don't explain fully? Do you analyze your evidence, explaining how you interpret it and how it supports your thesis? Do you anticipate your readers' likely questions? Do you address counter-arguments and opinions? Once you have made a claim, the rest of the paper should be devoted to proving your point. When you use ideas or words from research, what you say about them should also support your point.

## Composition

Writing with authority requires clear presentation and style. A paper that includes grammatical or spelling errors, unclear sentences, inappropriate diction, half-formed ideas, or digressions will do little to give the reader confidence in the writer's knowledge. Composition covers issues of Standard Written English: grammar, precise and appropriate diction, punctuation, and spelling. It also covers formatting issues, such as MLA formatting: title, one-inch margins, 11- or 12-point Times New Roman or Arial font, double-spacing, class and assignment information (provided at the top left corner), in-text citations, and Works Cited pages. Last—but never least—composition includes style—your ability to write creatively, use varying sentence structures, and choose interesting language.